

Remarks at a Dinner for Senator Barbara Boxer in Los Angeles, California
April 19, 2010

Hello, everybody. Thank you, everybody. Please have a seat. Have a seat. I've got so many good friends in this magnificent setting that I don't want to single anybody out, but there are a couple of people that I do have to acknowledge. First of all, our two DNC southern California cochairs, John Emerson and Ken Solomon, thank you for everything that you've done to make this evening possible.

I feel bad for the Emersons, though. Apparently they were on their way to Paris—*[laughter]*—and the ash got in the way. So this is a consolation—*[laughter]*—spending time with me. But I'm thrilled to be here. They've been longtime supporters ever since I first ran for the United States Senate. And Ken's been just a terrific supporter of Democratic causes and my campaigns as well. So thank you, to all of you.

He started off not only as one of the finest Governors in the country, he was also the first person to endorse me outside of the State of Illinois. Now, I have to admit that he was term-limited, so—*[laughter]*—maybe there wasn't that much of a downside to it. But at a time when nobody could pronounce my name and nobody gave me a chance, this person stood beside me in the seat of the old Confederacy, in Richmond, Virginia. And I am so grateful to him for not only the leadership he showed on behalf of the Commonwealth of Virginia but the leadership he's shown as our DNC chair. Please give Tim Kaine a big round of applause.

Now, I don't know if he's still here, but you've got an outstanding mayor in Mayor Villaraigosa, so please give him a big round of applause.

And obviously I want everybody to give a bunch of whoops and hollers on behalf of our honoree, the person who we are going to make sure gets four terms in the United States Senate, Barbara Boxer. Give Barbara a big round of applause. And give Stu a big round of applause for putting up with Barbara. Thank you, Stu.

You know, many of you know that Barbara has been a huge champion of clean energy, energy independence, environmental protection; she loves hybrids and plug-ins. And it is, therefore, appropriate that we have as a Senator a subcompact model—*[laughter]*—with inexhaustible energy. *[Laughter]*

I'm not going to be long tonight. I just want to say a little bit about Barbara but also a little bit about the state of our Union.

You know, when we came into office at the beginning of last year, we were confronting as many difficulties, as many challenges, as probably any President since FDR. We had a war in Iraq that required us to begin phasing down effectively. We had a war in Afghanistan that needed more focus. We had the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, losing 750,000 jobs every single month. And California has obviously been hit as hard as any State in the Union. We had a housing crisis, a crisis in the auto industry. We had a crisis in the financial industry that looked like it might be on the verge of meltdown. And obviously, the pain and difficulty that small businesses, large businesses, and their employees were suffering throughout this State and States all across the country were something that we just had not seen in a generation.

And so we had to act swiftly, and we did. We put in place the largest stimulus in history that included the largest investment in clean energy in history, the largest investment in Federal education in history, the largest investment in R&D and science in history, the biggest tax cuts that we've seen in a very, very long time—going to 98 percent of Californians—all of which were designed to do two things, not just to wrench ourselves out of this immediate crisis but were also designed to start laying a foundation for growth, because we knew that we couldn't keep repeating a pattern of bubble and bust that we'd been seeing, that it wasn't a tenable model for our future and of our—the future of our children and our grandchildren.

And we still have a long way to go. I mean, you travel across this State, or you travel across this country, and people are hurting everywhere. People are still out of work. Small businesses are still struggling to get credit. And we're not going to rest until those folks who are willing to work hard and put their blood, sweat, and tears into achieving the American Dream have that opportunity once again.

But what we can say is that an economy that was shrinking rapidly is now growing again, that businesses that were shedding workers are now hiring again, that consumers are now spending again, that business investment is taking place again, that the financial market is stabilized and a lot of folks who were counting on that 401(k) being there for their retirement, that that has not—if not completely been restored in value, has come a long way from those dark days just a year ago.

All of this would not have been possible had it not been for folks like Barbara Boxer. And so—[*applause*]—and I don't want you to underestimate the courage of Barbara, because we knew some of the steps that we were taking were going to be unpopular at the time. Sometimes reporters act as if we don't have pollsters. [*Laughter*] We do. We take polls all the time. We know when something is not going to be popular. But we also know that sometimes if you're doing right by the country, you've got to ignore the short-term politics. You can't make decisions based on what's good for the next election; you make decisions based on what's good for the next generation. And that's what Barbara Boxer has done consistently throughout his—her career.

I love a story she told me backstage. She said a reporter came up to her and said, "You know what? You've been one of the most consistent Senators politically I've ever seen, but your hair is not consistent." [*Laughter*] Sometimes it's—[*laughter*]. My hair is consistent, Barbara, by the way. [*Laughter*]

But it's true. One of the reasons to support Barbara Boxer is because you know exactly where she stands. You know where she came from. You know that she cares about working families. You know that she cares about giving them not a handout but a hand up. You know that she cares about making sure that every child gets a decent education, that workers are getting decent wages and basic workplace protections. You know that she cares about making sure this environment and our natural resources are passed on to the next generation. You know that she cares about making sure that we've got a foreign policy that is smart and balanced and thinks about how we can work cooperatively with other nations even as we are adamant about our security.

And Barbara hasn't wavered. And she wants to cooperate with folks on the other side of the aisle where she can, but she's willing to fight where she has to. And that's not a bad adage, by the way, for the Democratic Party. In this entire year and a half of cleaning up the mess, it's been tough because the folks very responsible for a large portion of this mess decided to stand on the sidelines. It was as if somebody had driven their car into the ditch and then just watched

you as you had to yank it out and asked you, "Why didn't you do it faster, and why do I have that scratch on the fender?" [*Laughter*] And you want to say, "Why don't you put your shoulder up against that car and help to push?" That's what we need, is some help.

And it wasn't forthcoming. It wasn't forthcoming when it came to economic recovery, and I don't know if you noticed, but it wasn't forthcoming when it came to trying to make sure that every American has secure health care in this country. And yet we got it done anyway without their help.

But, you know, they've still got some opportunities to help. Right now there's some unfinished business that remains. We have passed a historic health care bill because of people like Barbara Boxer. We have seen the economy begin to recover. But there remains some structural changes, some structural fixes to this extraordinary system that we've got that we're going to have to undertake. And we're going to need people like Barbara in the trenches fighting for those things.

We're going to need a comprehensive energy bill that makes sure that we are finally moving away from the old ways of doing business into the new ways of doing business, that we're seizing the opportunities of the 21st century, that we're creating jobs here in the United States building wind turbines and solar panels and making sure that those jobs are created right here in the United States, that we're building the cars of the future.

Just one small statistic, because it gives you a sense of what's possible: Before the Recovery Act, the United States made 2 percent of the world's advanced batteries. We are now poised to have 20 percent of the market, and in a few years, we can have as much as 40 percent of the market. We're seeing an entirely new industry being created right here in the United States of America because of the investments we made in clean energy.

Now, you duplicate that across sectors, and you think about what that can do to put Californians back to work—because Californians have always been at the forefront of this stuff—and do it in a way that at the same time deals with this threat of climate change and makes sure that we are preserving our natural inheritance for the next generation. It is something that we're going to have to do and we will do, building on the work that Barbara has already done in her committee. We thank you, Barbara, for that. And I'm going to be right next to you to make sure that we can get a comprehensive energy bill done. That is something that we've got to fight for.

And then we've got financial regulatory reform. Now, I have consistently said, I believe fiercely in a free market. And I believe that a vibrant, dynamic financial sector is part of that free market. We can't have successful businesses if we don't have a successful and vibrant financial sector. But we have to acknowledge that the status quo has not worked. We've got to acknowledge that it hasn't worked for ordinary Americans; it hasn't worked for the economy as a whole. It's worked for a few but not for the many.

When we've got a situation where people are allowed to take wild risks and all the downsides are socialized even as the profits are privatized, then something's going to have to change. When we don't have basic rules of the road in place that assures that consumers aren't abused and tricked, and investors don't know what's going on, then something's got to change.

Now, we've got the opportunity to change coming up in the next few weeks. And you watch where Barbara Boxer is going to be, because she's going to be on the sides of investors and consumers and small businesses and on the side of making sure that we never again have any kind of taxpayer bailouts. And then you look at some of the rhetoric that's coming out of

the other side of the aisle, and you see folks that so far, at least, don't seem to acknowledge that we're going to have to make some tough decisions and reform the system. The American people understand it. It should be common sense. But unfortunately, the lobbies and the money that is poured into campaigns has ended up distorting that basic truth.

Fortunately, Barbara Boxer is not swayed. She knows what she stands for. She knows whose side she's on. And that's why you've got to send her back to the United States Senate, because she is going to help us get this stuff done.

Comprehensive immigration reform, we've got to get done. Making sure that we continue the progress that's already been made and we overturn "don't ask, don't tell," that has to get done. Making sure that we're investing in science and technology and continuing to make our education system work better than any education system in the world so that our children can compete, that remains to be done.

So we've got a lot of business to do here. And I can't think of somebody I'd rather have beside me—somebody who has been a tougher fighter but also a happy warrior, somebody who is just thrilled every day to serve her constituents and just bleeds with them when they're down and celebrates with them when they're doing well, who just wears her heart on her sleeve and cares so deeply about this country—than Barbara Boxer.

And so these mid-year races are the ones where, historically, it's always been hardest to get folks activated, particularly the party in power. I mean, you remember 2008. That was fun, right? *[Laughter]* Because it was so obvious that the course we were on wasn't working. And everything felt fresh and new. And now we've gone through a year and a half of tough fights. And some folks are impatient, and some folks just didn't realize how long this was going to take and how hard each battle was going to be. And so people get kind of worn down, and in some cases, people get complacent; some cases, people take things for granted.

But you can't take it for granted. You can't take for granted that the next Supreme Court appointee or the Supreme Court appointee after that is going to reflect your values. You can't take that for granted, unless you know that you've got not just a President but also a United States Senate that is willing to work on behalf of the things that we care about: making sure that everybody's got a chance, making sure that opportunity is open to all; making sure that those ladders into the middle class, into the American Dream, are there; making sure that there's a basic safety net for the vulnerable and the aged and the infirm; making sure that the thing that makes us Democrats, this notion that this country is there for everybody, that everybody has got to have a shot, and that it's nothing—there's nothing wrong with us even as we affirm our individualism, saying, you know what, I'm going to help my neighbor, I'm going to help my friend, I'm going to help my coworker, I'm going to help somebody I may not know because that's part of what America is all about.

You can't take for granted that spirit. It has to be fought for; it has to be worked on. And people who embody it have to be supported. Barbara Boxer is one of those people. And so I want you to work just as hard, I want you to write just as many checks, I want you to call just as many people, I want you to knock on just as many doors as you did for me on behalf of Barbara Boxer. And if you do, I guarantee you we're going to send her back for another term as a great United States Senator from the great State of California.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you, and God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:01 p.m. at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. In his remarks, he referred to Stewart Boxer, husband of Sen. Boxer. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 20.

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